

**Thomas Jefferson to Pierre S. Dupont de Nemours,
April 15, 1811 , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in
Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited
by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO DUPONT DE NEMOURS J. MSS.

Monticello, April 15, 1811.

Dear Sir, —I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letters of January 20 and September 14, 1810, and, with the latter, your observations on the subject of taxes. They bear the stamps of logic and eloquence which mark everything coming from you, and place the doctrines of the Economists in their strongest points of view. My present retirement and unmeddling disposition make of this *une question viseuse pour moi*. But after reading the observations with great pleasure, I forwarded them to the President and Mr. Gallatin, in whose hands they may be useful. Yet I do not believe the change of our system of taxation will be forced on us so early as you expect, if war be avoided. It is true we are going greatly into manufactures; but the mass of them are household manufactures of the coarse articles worn by the laborers and farmers of the family. These I verily believe we shall succeed in making to the whole extent of our necessities. But the attempts at fine goods will probably be abortive. They are undertaken by company establishments, and chiefly in the towns; will have little success and short continuance in a country where the charms of agriculture attract every being who can engage in it. Our revenue will be less than it would be were we to continue to import instead of manufacturing our coarse goods. But the increase of population and production will keep pace with that of manufactures, and maintain the quantum of exports at the present level at least; and the imports need be equivalent to them, and consequently the revenue on them be undiminished. I keep up

Library of Congress

my hopes that if war be avoided, Mr. Madison will be able to complete the payment of the national debt within his term, after which one-third of the present revenue would support the government. Your information that a commencement of excise had been again made, is entirely unfounded. I hope the death blow to that most vexatious and unproductive of all taxes was given at the commencement of my administration, and believe its revival would give the death blow to any administration whatever. In most

of the middle and southern States some land tax is now paid into the State treasury, and for this purpose the lands have been classed and valued, and the tax assessed according to that valuation. In these an excise is most odious. In the eastern States land taxes are odious, excises less unpopular. We are all the more reconciled to the tax on importations, because it falls exclusively on the rich, and with the equal partition of intestate's estates, constitute the best agrarian law. In fact, the poor man in this country who uses nothing but what is made within his own farm or family, or within the United States, pays not a farthing of tax to the general government, but on his salt; and should we go into that manufacture as we ought to do, we will pay not one cent. Our revenues once liberated by the discharge of the public debt, and its surplus applied to canals, roads, schools, &c., and the farmer will see his government supported, his children educated, and the face of his country made a paradise by the contributions of the rich alone, without his being called on to spare a cent from his earnings. The path we are now pursuing leads directly to this end, which we cannot fail to attain unless our administration should fall into unwise hands.

Another great field of political experiment is opening in our neighborhood, in Spanish America. I fear the degrading ignorance into which their priests and kings have sunk them, has disqualified them from the maintenance or even knowledge of their rights, and that much blood may be shed for little improvement in their condition. Should their new rulers honestly lay their shoulders to remove the great obstacles of ignorance, and press the remedies of education and information, they will still be in jeopardy until another generation comes into place, and what may happen in the interval cannot be predicted, nor shall you or I live to see it. In these cases I console myself with the reflection that those

Library of Congress

who will come after us will be as wise as we are, and as able to take care of themselves as we have been. I hope you continue to preserve your health, and that you may long continue to do so in happiness, is the prayer of yours affectionately.